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Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[17 February 2014]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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HL Panel on the 65th Anniversary of Convention on Prevention of Genocide

Twenty years after the genocide in Rwanda and sixty-nine years after the Holocaust, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and genocide continue as repressive regimes deliberately target and destroy ethnic and religious minorities around the world. Since the killing of up to one million Rwandans in 1994 despite the presence of UN peace keeping forces, all UN Secretary-Generals and governments around the globe have insisted in bold declarations that this catastrophe never should happen again. Despite these announcements every year tens of thousands of civilians in Syria, Sudan, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic and many other states become victims of crimes against humanity.

On 9 December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide". In Article I, contracting parties declared genocide to be a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish. But despite these announcements there was no international action against the genocide in Biafra (Nigeria), which has caused hunger blockades against the civilian population and the deliberate killing of more than two million civilians.

No state has intervened than Indonesia has launched genocide in East Timor. It's only up to the democratization process in Indonesia, the commitment of the former colonial power Portugal and the advocacy activities of national and international NGO's that East Timor finally became an independent state and member of the United Nations. But impunity persists. The survivors of the genocide in East Timor still are voiceless, because their testimonies of their suffering have not been published in order to avoid a diplomatic crisis with Indonesia. Hundreds of thousands of victims of genocide and violence still are traumatized, but they are lacking psychological assistance and there is no real reconciliation between victims and perpetrators of violence.

The victims of mass killings in Sudan's Darfur and South Kordofan (Nuba Mountains) regions have been forgotten for years. Most governments primarily were concerned about the political implications, if they would confirm that genocide has been committed. Therefore they have opted for no action hoping that the situation would improve. In the Darfur crisis it took several years before the Security Council finally convened to act and has sent a combined peace keeping force of the United Nations and the African Union. But the suffering of the civilian population in Darfur has continued for eleven years because the peace keeping forces are ill equipped, not supported by the Sudanese authorities and mostly concerned about their own security. In the year 2013 violence in Darfur has escalated once again and more than 300.000 civilians became internally displaced.

We are thankful for the initiative of former UN Special Representative on Internally Displaced People, Francis Deng, who suggested in 1995 the new principle that the international community had not only a right, but a responsibility to step in than states were failing to protect their own citizens. In the year 2001 the independent "International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS)" has released their first report on the "Responsibility to Protect". In December 2004, the "Responsibility to Protect" was adopted as a principle by a High-Level Panel of experts commissioned by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Member states unanimously endorsed the "Responsibility to Protect" at the UN World Summit in September 2005. Since that time the UN Secretary-General has presented five comprehensive reports on this principle, the latest report has been published on July 9, 2013. We are very thankful for his commitment to encourage all UN member states not to ignore crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and genocide, but to advocate for more international mechanisms to effectively stop gross human rights violations. No state should be a bystander to genocide and crimes against humanity because mass atrocities have long-lasting negative impacts far beyond the states in which they occur.

Despite this commitment to ensure a better protection of the civilian population the human rights crisis in Libya, Myanmar, South Sudan and Central African Republic have shown that the existing mechanisms to stop mass atrocities are not sufficient and that most state governments are lacking political will to act and to stop the suffering of the civilian population. Instead of implementing the principle "Responsibility to Protect" they are choosing to provide humanitarian assistance to the people suffering. Certainly the victims of mass atrocities are lacking humanitarian relief but this will not stop violence.

Since mid-December 2013 thousands of civilians in South Sudan became victims of human rights violations, committed by all conflict parties in their power struggle. A still unknown figure of civilians has been murdered in massacres only due to their ethnic origin. The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has been overwhelmed by some 80.000 civilians who have searched for protection in their camps. Once again UN missions were ili-equipped and not well prepared to ensure the protection of the civilian population. Fortunately at least in their UN camps they were able to prevent new massacres or massive human rights violations. But beyond these UN camps, they were unable to ensure protection.

In January 2014, the civil war in Central African Republic has escalated. Muslim minority people have been targeted by militias and French and African peacekeepers were unable to ensure their protection.

Therefore, more than 70.000 people of the Muslim minority had to search for protection in neighboring countries. Despite many early warnings of international NGO's the international community has not acted in time to prevent mass atrocities and is still unable to ensure the protection of minority people.

We are welcoming that the Security Council has issued a presidential statement reaffirming commitment to protection of civilians in armed conflict on February 12, 2014. We are calling on the UN Human Rights Council to urge the international community to implement the principle "Responsibility to Protect" and to continue to search for better and more effective early warning mechanisms for mass atrocities and for a speedy process of launching international peace keeping missions in conflict areas.